

# Background for November 16 event

Thanks for registering for the workshop at London Metropolitan University [Citizen-led hubs: building the ecosystem together](#) on new ways to connect citizens, build communities, and make London a more networked city. *Game report now here* <http://networkedcity.london/hubgame/overview>

**Venue:** GC1-08, London Metropolitan University, 166-220 Holloway Road, London, N7 8DB

**Registration and refreshments 1pm. Start 2pm. Close 5.30pm**

The event is a collaboration between the Connecting Londoners group, London Met, and Our Way Ahead - a network of London civil society and grassroots networks.

**During the afternoon we will:**

- Hear about the challenges facing Londoners and civil society groups and organisations
- Discuss how network mapping, online systems, storytelling and self-organising can be used to develop support systems
- Form collaborations with others during a role play game to create innovative solutions
- Discuss how these ideas could set the agenda for a network of change agents - and contribute to plans for civil society infrastructure

## Context

Cuts in funding have led to the closure of the 107-year-old London Voluntary Service Council, the only pan-London organisation to represent 120,000 community groups, networks and charities.

Over the past year London Funders, LVSC and Greater London Volunteering have worked with a wide range of organisations and agencies on The Way Ahead initiative to plan future support systems. The Greater London Authority is also consulting on its civil society strategy.

The main recommendation from The Way Ahead was creation of resource hub, and in early November City Bridge Trust [issued a press release](#) announcing first year funding of £350,000:

*A new charity support body, Hub for London, is soon to launch to strengthen the capital's voluntary sector.*

*The City of London Corporation's charitable funder and London's largest independent grant giver, City Bridge Trust, has awarded £350,000 towards the new organisation which will bring together and provide support to the capital's voluntary sector.*

*Hub for London will strengthen the charity sector in the capital by providing access to business, organisational, technical and enterprise support to civil society organisations, as well as online resources.*

*City Bridge Trust's funding will secure the first year of operation for Hub for London which will be run by Greater London Volunteering.*

*Hub for London will allow charities to access and share data and information, training schemes and good practice. By building cross-sector links and partnerships, the Hub will mean voluntary and community organisations have a 'voice' within the on-going debate about London, its governance and the issues it faces.*

*As well as helping London's voluntary sector to access organisational support, the Hub will help organisations to work together and provide a platform for a number of voluntary sector networks, such as the London Safer Futures Network.*

*Membership will be open to any individual or organisation based in London.*

The other key elements of The Way Ahead recommendations were that future civil society solutions should be co-produced with citizens; based on an understanding of community assets and needs; and where possible developed with and by community interests.

While many elements of the proposals in The Way Ahead have been welcomed, a coalition of grassroots groups and organisations say that proposals have not been co-produced, and the Hub is a top-down solution that will not on its own meet their needs. They have developed a network of networks called Our Way Ahead to promote a more comprehensive solution.

Our Way Ahead is supported by Connecting Londoners, an informal group that developed from an exploration into London as a Networked City, originally funded by LVSC.

More here about [Our Way Ahead](#) and [Connecting Londoners commentary on The Way Ahead](#) - or go to <http://www.connectinglondoners.blog/> for the latest.

## LVSC report on the Hub

Before its closure LVSC, one of the partners in The Way Ahead, published a report on the Hub by consultant Steve Wyler. Steve suggested “Connecting Londoners” as a possible name for the initiative ... and when that wasn’t taken up we adopted the name. We have used Steve’s report, together with the results of our own exploration, as the basis for workshop briefing and materials.

Among the key points of analysis and recommendations from Steve’s research are:

- What matters is not organisations per se, but how Londoners in association with others can take action
- Any system should operate across all sectors in the service of Londoners
- Local front line organisations are a primary asset, and communities of interest are important.
- Centralised solutions are unlikely to work. Building horizontal peer-exchange mechanisms is important
- Any design solutions should be preceded by an exploration on future London scenarios

The possible functions of the Hub in the report are:

### **Improving the system of support**

Developing a shared support platform, for local, borough-wide, London-wide and national support providers willing to engage positively in the ‘Connecting Londoners’ project (including public and private sources as well as voluntary sector sources). This might include: creating a pool of open-source resources available to all support providers and those seeking support; embracing all forms of social organisation not just traditional charity models, identifying ‘first points of contact’ (for volunteering, social action, governance support, social enterprise, funding advice etc), testing peer-based quality systems; building a shared brand for the system of support, and showcasing good and innovative support models.

### **Gathering ‘real-time’ intelligence about London’s community life**

Building a far-reaching network of agencies and volunteers who can act as the interface between civil society and the general public, and therefore offer credible insight into the lived experiences of

Londoners, highlighting problems and also opportunities, with the ability to co-design potential solutions, promote social integration, and campaign effectively for change. Over time this would be a way to amplify and build credibility for the voices of London's civil society, bringing them more to the forefront of debates and decision-making within, for example, London's local authorities, CCGs, business sector bodies, and the GLA. And it could be accompanied by an annual report on London's civil society, assessing its benefits and highlighting opportunities for investment.

### **Promoting positive change**

Making the most of its convening power to increase incubation, innovation, and acceleration of civil society projects. This would include identifying where civil society can play a bigger role (one example might be social prescribing in health and social care). In such cases the activity would support and amplify the efforts of specialists concerned, for example by making the case for investment, helping with formation of bidding and delivery partnerships, promoting innovation, and helping to make more effective alliances with London's business community and public sectors, and new alliances with universities, arts networks etc.

### **Unleashing the resources of civil society**

Taking action to make fuller use of the resources within and available to civil society. This includes enhancing the systems of volunteering, time-banking, and other forms of mutual aid, through which the time and skills of Londoners freely given to other Londoners produce mutually beneficial outcomes. It might also include new ways of drawing on the skills and resourcefulness of voluntary sector staff and Board members, and maximising the use of buildings and other assets, to benefit London's community life.

The main recommendations in the report are:

- A compelling story of change
- Actions which can make a difference
- Working with the willing and the brave
- Building on the best
- Championing community expertise
- Building networks
- Agile working
- A strong and simple brand
- Proving and improving

There is now a Hub advisory group, with two places for Our Way Ahead, filled by David Wilcox and Christine Goodall. We can ensure that results of the workshop are reported to the advisory group.

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